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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE **WEEKLY** STORY EVERY WEEK.

DICK DARESOME'S SHOOTING MATCH, OR, THE PRIZE SCORE OF THE ACADEMY.

By FRANK FORREST.



"You are a cheat!" cried Herron. "This match is a fake! Give up that gun!" He rushed at Daresome and would have wrested the weapon away if Dick had not been half expecting such an attack! "Fake! Fake! Fake!" cried a dozen voices.

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WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

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DICK DARESOME'S SHOOTING MATCH

THE PRIZE SCORE OF THE ACADEMY

By FRANK FORREST

CHAPTER I.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF VICTORY.

"Never in a thousand years!"

"All right; you'll see! Mark my words, Nash Clayton, or you will be the worst fooled fellow in Merrivale!"

"Well, I may be crazy, but I am no goose," said the first speaker to his companion, as they stood on the steps of the Academy gymnasium one clear Friday morning.

"Oh, your opinion isn't worth a cent, Nash. Daresome can and will win that shooting match. I am willing to back up my own belief, and to be a sport on the subject, even if I don't like Dick Daresome personally."

The other stood in blank amazement at this unusual speech from his classmate.

"Great Scott! You, of all fellows in this boarding-school, Chigger Howard, to be willing to take a chance on anything! I never knew you to have spunk enough to be willing to take a chance on betting on the sunrise!"

The lad flushed as he replied:

"I'm disgusted with you and all the rest of our crowd, Nash Clayton. You never give any one a fair show, whether it's me or Dick Daresome. I just spent this last week having a look at Daresome while he practiced on the rifle range back of the dormitory."

Clayton laughed.

"Much good it did you!"

"Then show that you are not as much of a welcher as I think you are," retorted Howard. "I know what's what, and you think you do, too. Well, how much spondulix have you to stake on the event?"

Nash Clayton gasped for breath at this sudden burst of sporting instinct in the often ridiculed Chigger Howard.

"I'll cover all you can give at equal odds!" said Howard's companion. "Now, how does that strike you?"

"Fine," replied the other chap. "My grandfather has just mailed me a check for a hundred dollars. I'll risk the whole thing on it if you'll cover that."

Clayton gasped once more, and then pondered very seriously.

"That's a lot of money," he said slowly.

"Sure, and you've been calling me a tin-horn sport a mighty long time. Here's a chance to test out your own sporting qualities."

Clayton's face lit up with a sullen determination.

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed the lad. "I'll teach you and Dick Daresome a lesson—the precious two of you! I'll win that shooting tournament myself—get the prize score, and have a hundred bucks to help out on some things where they are badly needed."

The reader can well guess that Clayton was none too

overburdened with cash this late in the term. For he was an extravagant lad, whose allowance came easy from a hard-working father, to be spent easier.

His next speech showed this.

"I'll have to do some figuring if you want me to raise the money to put up as stakes," said he. "But I guess that's an easy way to borrow a touch, and then double on the investment, isn't it?"

Howard looked steadfastly at the other.

"Nash, you and I have different plans. I never borrow money unless I know I can pay it back. You won't have to put up the hundred now—we will just sign papers, each keeping a copy, showing that we are betting one hundred dollars, and agreeing to pay according to the results. Is that all right?"

"Yes," said the other fellow, smiling.

They scrawled duplicate notes of agreement to this effect on pieces of letter paper which Clayton produced, and then separated to proceed about their different class duties.

As Clayton left he could not conceal a deep, broad smile of anticipation.

"I guess that's about the easiest money I've made in a good while. Nothing to invest but some blank paper and a sure thing. For he bets that Daresome will win—and there are a dozen other fellows in the match besides Daresome, making the chances twelve to one against that goody-goody lobster!"

Howard looking back saw the laughing face of Clayton.

"Oh, ho! Mr. Nash Clayton, you think you've got me beaten to a pulp. We'll just see about that. I know a trick or two, and I guess that I'll make you hunt for the tall timber. I'm tired of being called Chigger Howard, the coward!"

Which proves that the worm will turn, for this very chap had been one of Clayton's staunchest supporters in that small percentage of Merrivale students who were jealous of Dick Daresome's success in the celebrated Academy.

Now he had a few plans of his own, which were well calculated to make the anti-Daresome contingent sit up and take close notice.

But meanwhile the actions of Nash Clayton were worth careful scrutiny.

Instead of going to his history class, as he should have done, he went to his room in the west end of the big dormitory.

All of the two hundred students of the Academy were housed in this large building, which had been divided in half, in order to cut down the possibilities of combined mischief.

Dick Daresome's room was in the half of the dormitory which faced toward the east.

The two sections of the building had separate entrances, and there was only one means of communication between

them directly, which was across the roof from one stair trap-door to the other.

Clayton knew this.

He was taking advantage of the absence of Dick Daresome to make his own victory the more certain.

"We'll see whether I am to lose every single honor in this school to this smart guy!" muttered Clayton.

As he hastened up to the top floor of his own entry he saw a fellow student lazily sitting half-dressed on the bed in a side room.

"Thunderation! What are you doing sleeping so late, Percy?" asked Clayton.

"This isn't late. And, besides, I'm sick."

The other yawned indolently.

"Late—it's after ten o'clock, and the classes are all going on."

"Well, then, why aren't you at your own classes?" asked the half-dressed individual.

"Because I have more important business afoot."

The other chap lost his sleepy look.

He sat up with keen attention.

"What is it? Something about that Daresome affair this afternoon at the shooting match?"

"Yes, Percy Herron. Why do you ask?"

"Because," responded Herron, "I've been thinking for the last two hours of some way to fix the deal on him, and stack the cards, as the gamblers call it."

Clayton looked jubilant.

He knew Percy Herron to be one of the craftiest fellows in the Academy.

He also knew him to be one of the most ardent, fiery and determined haters of Daresome that attended Merrivale Academy.

"What is it?"

"Well, I won't tell you until the time; but you can safely bet your grandmother's tintype that it will be nix on the Daresome business—that's the tip I have to hand out."

Clayton laughed merrily.

"I'm not betting my grandmother's tintype, but Chigger Howard is losing his mind and has bet me a hundred-dollar check of his grandfather's tin that Daresome will win. This is great. But for goodness sake don't let this get out and spoil it all."

"No, hardly; for betting in the school is an expelling offense. Probably he forgot about that," said Herron.

Clayton whistled with surprise not unmixed with growing pleasure.

"Ha! ha! That's better and more of it! If I should lose by any sort of a chance, methinks I can scare the life out of Howard by threatening to complain to the principal and refusing to pay a bet."

The two fellows, who it is unnecessary to say were not

the most popular in the Academy, pounded each other admiringly on the back.

"We're a hard team to beat," said Herron, as he started to put some more clothes on.

"Yes, and you can help me with a little matter just now," responded Clayton.

"What for, or what on?"

"I'm going up to the roof, cross over and pay a visit to Daresome's room while he's attending the history class."

"Ah, ha! a new scheme, too?"

"Yes. I will work a little trick with the sight on his gun that will teach him a lesson—after he loses the shooting trophy."

Herron was ready, and then the two started up the stairs and over the roof.

"Nash, this will fix Daresome without my having to work my own plan. But we will just have everything ready for him, as Napoleon used to do—being ready for every kind of defeat."

Clayton chuckled as he raised the trap-door at the top of the stairs leading to Dick's entry of the dormitory.

"Sssh! Make a noise like nothing, and we'll cinch the job! Sssh!"

Down the stairs they clambered silently and yet rapidly, and soon were in Dick's room.

It took them a few minutes to find Daresome's handsome gun, which had been presented to him by an old millionaire named VanDyke for saving the old chap's little grandson.

The gun was the envy of every lad in Merrivale Academy, and Dick, whose steady nerve and keen, quick eye were so wonderfully in his favor, had developed into a remarkably good shot with the fine weapon.

"Here it is, and nothing can save that trophy for him now," said Clayton.

But he was not quite so certain as he believed.

It never pays any one to be too confident of success, particularly in a matter which is not as straight and honest as it might be.

CHAPTER II.

A LUCKY SUSPICION.

Just as they were engaged in their nefarious plan a step was heard on the stairs.

"Cheese it, Nash!" said Herron hurriedly. "There's some one coming up."

"Where shall we dodge?"

"Under the table!"

"No, we'll be seen there!"

"Well, you get under that bed, and I will step into this

closet," said Herron, whose wits stuck by him a great deal better than did Clayton's.

Herron was naturally a trickster and such fellows have a born knack of keeping their heads above water in dangerous times.

Quick as a flash the two fellows disappeared.

The steps came nearer and nearer, and a well-built youth, with blue eyes and a merry yet manly face, hurried into the room humming a popular tune to himself.

He was in happy spirits beyond a doubt.

"La, la, la! Why, what's this?"

He looked in surprise at his rifle, which was laid across the study table.

The reader must know that the newcomer was no other than Dick Daresome.

He looked closely at the weapon, then gazed with knit brows about the large room which he occupied with his roommate, Sam Thorpe.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Dick.

He took the gun up, and as he did so he saw a pair of iron pincers on the table.

These, too, he examined, and then looked about him with increasing perplexity.

Suddenly a thought flashed into his mind which caused quick action.

"This is the funniest thing I have ever seen in my life. Here that fool roommate of mine has left my gun out on the table. I won't say anything to him about it because he'll get sore. I'll wait until after the match this afternoon and then I'll tell him what I think about it."

These words were uttered in clear tones, loud enough to carry to the two culprits who kept themselves hid, hoping against hope that Dick would not discover their tracks.

At the words their hearts leaped with joy, for they believed that he had not noticed anything unusual about the weapon or its condition.

This was exactly what Dick Daresome had cunningly wished them to think.

For the quick-witted lad had seen evidences of tampering on the sight of his rifle, and it did not need a knock on the head with a sledge-hammer for him to guess that something was brewing in the nature of trouble.

"La, la, la!" sang Dick. "I'll hustle back to the class. I don't believe it's worth while for me to do any more practicing before that match—I may lose my nerve."

With these words, also spoken clearly and distinctly, Dick left the room and tramped noisily down the stairs.

Then he raced around the building with fleet footsteps and mounted the stairway of the west entry.

Hastening to the top floor he looked about him.

Half-way down the corridor he spied a trunk that some lad had left emptied in the hallway. Smiling to himself, Dick lifted the lid of this and stepped inside.

He lowered the cover, and crouched down in the confined space, waiting patiently for the confirmation of his suspicions, and thought a few plans of his own.

Meanwhile, the conspirators emerged from their own hiding places in Dick's room.

"Gosh! But that was a close call!"

Clayton gasped as he said this, for under the bed he had been doubled up most uncomfortably, hardly daring to breathe for fear that he would betray himself.

"Whew! I'm nearly suffocated," said Herron, as he, too, stepped forth with a sigh of relief, to take a deep, enjoyable breath. "That closet is as close as the bark on a tree!"

Clayton looked cautiously out of the window.

He saw a lad going up the steps of the recitation building, and chuckled with regained confidence.

"There goes Daresome now, back to the history class. I guess he forgot his note book. Isn't it lucky he blamed that on Sam Thorpe about the rifle?"

Herron nodded.

"Yes, and I'm glad he's not going to say anything until he shoots for the prize!"

Clayton recollected another remark that the lad had dropped with such apparent carelessness.

"Yes, and the best luck of all is that he won't practice before the tournament. We can fix this sight quickly, and then trust implicitly in our own scheme!"

The lads went to work again on the weapon.

"You hold it there with your big iron paws," said Herron to Clayton, who was much his superior in strength and bulk. "I'll use the pincers."

"Give it a twist for me!" laughed Clayton.

"We'll twist it all O. K.," answered his fellow conspirator with a happy smile.

He delivered a few deft jerks and twists to the sight of the rifle.

The touches were really very delicate, but they managed to put the sight over just the tiniest fraction of an inch. This was enough to make the marksman shoot very much awry.

The conspirators were tickled with their own cleverness.

"Shall we put the gun back into place, Perce?" queried Clayton.

"No; we will leave it here just where it was when he was in the room. It's lucky he didn't see the pincers."

The lads slipped into the corridor, up the stairs to the roof. Over this they proceeded with cautious speed, and then down the iron ladder to the top floor of the other entry.

As they did so they were entirely unaware that the lid of the near-by trunk was lifted a small part of an inch above the rest of its frame.

Through this tiny slit two bright eyes were watching them descend the ladder.

Once down it, they dusted off their palms and laughed with conceited glee as they looked approvingly at each other.

"Well, well, well! Who'd a-thunk it?" chuckled Clayton, as he drew imaginary pictures of Daresome's failure.

"Oh, but this is too good to keep," said Herron. "Yet we must hold it as a bosom secret until the affair this afternoon is over, and then we'll tell our own particular set."

Clayton shook his head.

"My boy, we must keep mum about this, for there is more at stake than a mere prize. I'd rather have Dick Daresome himself win than to have this secret get out."

As they went down the stairway and out of view, Dick raised the trunk lid.

"He'd rather have me win than to have the secret get out. Very well, I'll just make his wish come true, by George!" muttered Dick.

Then with surprising quickness he hustled over the roof to his own room. He snatched up the rifle and rushed downstairs with it.

Straight to the engineer's quarters went Dick. These were down under the big dining-room, and the engineer was a mechanical genius.

"See here, Mr. Patton," cried Dick, rushing into the presence of the engineer, "I'll tell you a secret—some one's been tampering with the sight of my rifle."

"What? Well, of all things I ever heard this is the cussedest!" exclaimed the engineer.

He was a great admirer of young Daresome, and like every one else about Merrivale he knew how bitter was the rivalry between Dick and the envious factions.

"Yes, they've twisted the sight. You can see the mark of a pair of nippers or pincers here at the muzzle. Can you fix this in time for me to use this afternoon?"

Dick's anxious face made the engineer laugh.

"You just bet I can," said he. "I've done harder jobs than that, and I've a couple of hours practically all to myself. I'll get this back all right. I didn't work in a big gun factory at Springfield for nothing, you know."

"You'll be my friend for life, then," said Dick. "Now, I must get back to that history class with the note book I went to get in my room. I'll get bounced from the Academy before the match if I'm not careful."

The engineer looked after our manly friend's disappearing figure. The light of approval was in his eyes.

"There is a boy who will make good at everything he touches—that is, unless he is conquered by too much under-handed business. I'll just see to it that he isn't queered by this job."

Needless to say the engineer kept his word, and by afternoon the rifle was in perfect condition again.

This was to cause a great surprise, and the engineer

smiled over his work as he thought of the trick against a trick.

"I reckon Dick will show those crooks, whoever they are, that you can't get ahead of the right kind of boy."

CHAPTER III.

A BULL'S-EYE BATTLE.

The time for the shooting tournament came, and the Merrivale students flocked down to the range, which was located back of the dormitory and recitation buildings.

The course of the marksmen was so arranged that the shots would imbed themselves in the sloping hillside, in case they missed the targets altogether.

But it must be said to the credit of the Merrivale boys that very few of the many shots fired in that match went past the targets.

As a body they were remarkably able young marksmen, and they were a credit to the school.

The tournament opened with a number of small events, such as shots at swinging targets and the like.

"These don't count," said Sam Thorpe, Dick's roommate, who was one of the scorers of the affair. "I'm glad that Dick isn't bothering with them."

After a little mild interest in these first eye-openers, as they might well have been called, the Merrivale students massed closer to the line of marksmen, in order to get a better view of the regular contest.

This was to be a long one—the best score out of fifty shots apiece.

"Now, Dick," cautioned Chester Brown, the little lame lad, who was one of Daresome's closest allies, "keep your nerve steady, and you'll have the trophy cinched."

"Yes, we need that elk's head in our room," said Sam in an aside to Daresome.

The trophy was a silver elk's head on a plaque of wood, with a plate for the name of the winner of the trophy. It had been offered by the teachers in order to develop an interest in marksmanship.

Dick stepped forth, and he saw by the toss-up to determine the order of shooting that he was to be first on the list.

"That's tough," he muttered. "But, anyway, I'll work my hardest."

Then he squared off and began his shots, taking five at a time.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Every bullet imbedded itself in the target within the first circle of the plate.

Bang!

Another shot, and Dick had come even closer to the bull's-eye.

Just then he heard a sudden scuffling behind him, and before he realized it a heavily built fellow was shoved over against him. The trigger was under his finger, and in another instant he would have pulled it.

Bump!

"Aw, look out what you're doing!" bellowed a deep voice, and Dick staggered back from a collision with Nash Clayton.

"Are you trying to queer me?" cried Daresome angrily, as he regained his balance.

Clayton returned his look with still more ferocity.

"No, I'm not," he snarled. "Those fellows are pushing me, and if you can't get out of my way, it's your own fault!"

Dick heard a titter from the crowd, and saw the faces of several of the Clayton-Herron cronies smirking over this little affair.

"They are starting on another game," he thought to himself. "Well, I'll fool them."

Without another word to Clayton, Dick turned toward Professor Watts, who was representing the teachers as judge of the shooting match.

"Professor, there's a little funny business going on here, and I wish you would clear off this space around me so I can shoot in peace!"

Clayton flared up at Dick's words.

"Are you trying to say I'm crooked?" he growled, lurching toward our hero.

"If I can wallop him in a fight," thought Clayton, "it will queer him of the chance to win by ruining his nerves."

Then he spied the faces of several of the teachers, and he remembered his own precarious standing in the school owing to past ill-conduct.

The professor waved the crowd back.

"Every one of you stand ten feet away from the marksman at his turn," said he.

Dick quietly turned and delivered the fifth shot. It struck the absolute center of the bull's-eye.

His nerve was improving instead of weakening under the strain.

"Great work, Daresome!" cried Chester Brown.

"Fine, Dick!" said Skinniman Perkins, the heavyweight of the school, whose heart was just as large as his proportions.

He, too, was in the contest, but he had that fine sporting blood which can admire the work of a clever opponent.

"That's a pretty poor start," muttered Dick to himself. "I should have made the bull's-eye every time. Anyway, I got inside the first small circle."

Alan Brownson's turn came next, and his five shots landed in the second circle.

He looked with a comical grimace at Dick as he stepped back.

"Dick, I guess you've got me safely out of it!"

Daresome shook his head.

"It's too early to tell, Alan," said our friend, "for in a long score like this it is the general average that counts, not the first round of shots."

Skinniman next stepped up.

His score was as good as Dick's.

Then came Nash Clayton, with every shot striking straight into the heart of the target. His five shots were perfect.

"Great!"

"Hurrah for Clayton!"

"Rah! rah! rah! Nash!"

The supporters yelled and cheered, making up in noise what they lacked in numbers. Clayton was not generally popular in the school, despite his strength and athletic skill.

He stepped back with a triumphant leer at Dick, who said not a word.

The rest of the dozen marksmen took their turn, and then it was Dick's turn to start again.

This time he brought his score up better still, making two bull's-eyes, with three shots in the close little circle.

Clayton was watching his improving marksmanship with puzzled expression.

"How under the sun can he be working that gun after we fixed it?" he mused.

He was not the only one puzzled.

Percy Herron, standing a few feet in the rear, was glaring at our hero with a pale face.

"There is something funny about that," he muttered; "for it is impossible for him to use that sight as we fixed it. I'm going to watch."

Then he sidled up closely to Dick Daresome, while the latter stood back to give the other fellows their opportunity to shoot.

Herron peered with keen eyes at the end of Dick's gun. Then he gasped in surprise, for he beheld marks of some instrument on the end of the muzzle—marks that he had not made.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" muttered the crafty fellow. "He has had his gun fixed, and by a regular gunsmith, too, for the whole end of the gun has been filed off better than it was before we got to work on it!"

Dick turned suddenly and caught Herron's glance on the end of the gun.

Herron looked up with a flush, and Dick winked at him as their eyes met.

It was the most provoking, tantalizing thing the youth could have done.

That wink had a world of meaning—it made fun of

Herron, it proved to him that Dick knew every bit of his secret, and it was evidence that our hero intended going right ahead and winning the match.

The match went on.

Herron disappeared, as Dick noticed during one of the lulls, but the youth was not worrying.

After each round the markers would walk forward, examine the targets and report on them.

One of the markers was a student in the Academy, and the other was one of the fellows from the Village of Merivale, who worked at all sorts of odd jobs around the Academy.

Dick's score kept at its high average, and yet Clayton led by a small fraction.

"I can't understand how Daresome is doing this. He must have switched guns," thought Nash.—"I only hope that Percy Herron will work his game in case my own nerve goes back on me!"

The tourney kept moving forward, as one might say, until there were only three turns left between the contestants.

"Now, boys, we will just call a little recess," said Professor Watts. "Your nerves are all worn out, and a ten-minute wait will do you good."

The students in the contest were only too willing, and so they scattered about talking among their friends.

"Dick, you must hold up on your nerve and plant a bull's-eye every time," said Chester Brown. "If you do that you can win out over Clayton."

"I will do the best I can—an angel couldn't do more—not even with a good rifle!" laughed Dick. He put his weapon down on the ground, standing the upper part against the support of a tree.

Then he walked up and down a few steps with Chester and Sam.

"Your score is the second in the whole biz, Dick," said his friend and roommate; "so now be mighty careful: Clayton is first, Skinniman follows you, with Alan Brownson in fourth place."

"You bet I——" started Dick.

Then he heard a bang of some sort behind him, and he saw one of the Clayton crowd bump into his rifle with a side movement of his leg as he passed.

The weapon came to the ground with a crash.

Dick rushed over.

"You're trying to put this gun out of whack, aren't you?" he cried.

"Nothing of the sort," exclaimed the other fellow. "You can't blame me. If you want your gun to be taken care of you ought to keep it in your hands instead of blocking up the way with it."

Dick realized how cleverly true this was, and he said nothing.

He scrutinized along the barrel of the gun, and sure enough beheld that the sight had been twisted just the fraction that the conspirator had hoped for.

The fall and the brushing against the rough bark had done the work.

"By George! I'm done for, Sam," said Dick in despair. "That fellow has knocked the sight loose, and I can't do a thing now, as there's not another gun to get this late."

Sam gave expression to a few indescribable words under his breath.

"Let's see, Dick," said he.

Daresome handed over the gun, and Sam examined it closely and at great length.

"Say, I'll tell you what—don't you give up hope. You just calculate on this gun having been twisted. Aim about a hundredth of an inch to the left of this, and I'll bet you can get there just the same, Dick."

Daresome took the weapon, studied it and nodded.

"I haven't any measure to dope off a hundredth part of an inch," said he with a determined smile, "but I know what you mean, and I'll try that system."

The Professor called time, and the lads stood up.

Chigger Howard had been an interested spectator of the contest, and his heart went further and further down toward the center of the earth as he saw what a hard time Dick was having.

Suddenly his eyes flashed as he saw two figures standing together on the edge of the crowd.

They were no other than Percy Herron and the marker of the targets who had come down from the Village.

Just as the professor called for the contest to start once more Herron saw something slip from the hand of the student to the marker.

"What can this be, I wonder?"

Howard walked toward Herron to say something to him, when the crowd surged back for the marksmen to begin again.

The marker walked up to the targets and walked along them with the student marker to see that all was ready.

The villager's duty was to paint over the bullet holes of past scores, so that there could be no mistake.

He looked at all the targets, and then stepped out of range with a wave of his hand. This meant that all was ready for the shooting.

Dick Daresome stood up, looked along his barrel carefully, and after calculating for the slight twist, pulled the trigger with steady finger.

Bang!

"Bull's-eye!" sang out the student marker, as he ran forward to see.

Dick's heart gave a bound, for he knew that he had estimated the error correctly.

"Now, for more of them!"

He finished his round of shots, and every shot went straight to the center of the target.

Chigger Howard was watching Herron, and he saw a number of queer expressions come and go on his face.

"There's a grand-stand trick up that fellow's sleeve," thought Howard. "I used to be right in their plots all the time, but now I'm going to show them that I can do a little taking chances myself, for a change."

He drew closer to Herron.

Clayton's turn came, and it was evident that he was unable to keep up the strain of the splendid scoring that he had opened the tourney with.

His shots began to go a little wilder than before.

"Steady, Nash," cautioned Herron.

After him came the others of the twelve, and they all kept about the same relative places. Dick was now surging to the front, according to the average.

Again the Merrivale hero took the stand, and this time every shot was poured into the heart of the target.

It was magnificent shooting.

"Daresome, you're a wonder!" cried Chester.

"Good boy, Dick!" cried Wallace Clark, of the stanch and true brigade.

Herron and Clayton were muttering to each other. Not a movement missed Howard, but he could not hear their language, try as he would.

Clayton's turn was worse than before. Dick had now tied him on the average score.

It was indeed time for action, if the conspirators intended to win out, for our hero was now tied for first, and shooting better every instant, while Clayton's nerves were going to pieces.

Dick stepped forward to try the next shot—his last round. He noticed that the marker was standing very close to the target and seemed to be doing something, but the youth fired as soon as he had a clear coast.

Just then there was an outcry behind him, and Dick stopped.

"You are a cheat!" cried Herron. "This shooting match is a fake! Give up that gun!" He rushed at Daresome and would have wrested the weapon away if Dick had not been half-suspecting such an attack.

"Fake! Fake! Fake!" cried a dozen voices.

CHAPTER IV.

A VICTORY FOR HONESTY.

Dick Daresome swung his left foot back of Percy Herron's knee, as he clung persistently to the gun barrel. At the same time he gave a quick shove of the weapon against his assailant's breast.

Bump!

Herron fell over heavily from the force of this well-directed blow.

"Now, you just attend to your own business," said Dick with flashing eyes. "There's been enough crooked work about this business already!"

"Now, boys!" shouted the professor, rushing into the melee, "quit all this tussling or we will call off the entire shooting match! You must preserve order!"

"But the match is a fake!" yelled Herron, picking himself up. "Daresome has bribed the marker to do some crooked work—I saw him faking the target!"

Dick's face paled under the accusation.

"What do you mean, you contemptible, lying cur?" he cried, as he strode forward and brought a ringing slap across the cheek of Herron.

Only intercession by the students prevented a most spirited mill then and there.

"I just watched that fellow fixing Daresome's target so it would look as if he were hitting the bull's-eye. He has probably been doing it all the time."

The professor gravely listened to this accusation.

Then he held up his hand.

"I'll look into this myself, for I see more here than appears under the first glance. Let us see those targets."

He strode toward the target, followed by the contestants, all excited over this new development.

Sure enough, the marker had been filling up some of the holes, but the keen-minded teacher was not to be fooled. He gave a keen look at the fellow, and shook an angry finger in his face.

"You rascal!" said he. "What did you try to make this look like a crooked match for? These holes were the ones shot earlier, and now you are trying to make it look as if Dick Daresome were not hitting the bull's-eye. You have tried to cast disrepute on him. Who paid you for this?"

The villager was taken aback.

He could say nothing for a minute.

As he gulped, the student marker, who had been looking over the other targets, came forward with a word.

"Professor, I saw him doing something funny, and I'll take my oath he didn't do anything like it before, for this is the first time I've been any distance away from him. Daresome made those bull's-eyes sure enough the last turn, for I was watching very closely from the shelter."

Reaching forward the angry teacher so far lost control of his anger that he grasped the village fellow by the nape of the neck.

"Now, you have been trying to smirch Daresome by making it look as if his score were faked. Who paid you for this?"

The villager stammered.

"I—I—I think it was Daresome!" he said in a frightened way.

"He's game, all right!" muttered Herron to Clayton in an aside. "I felt sure he would stand by the plan. Now Dick Daresome is stung to a finish."

But he calculated without his host.

"You can't fool me," said the professor, "and if you don't confess all about this little deal I'll have you sent to jail!"

In reality there was no reason for punishing him, because the lawmakers haven't yet arranged for boarding-school lies as crimes to be punished. But the villager didn't remember this.

"Oh, but I don't know!" he began, getting well frightened at the prospect.

Herron saw that it was time to interpose before the fellow would betray him in self-defence.

"Professor, I object to this business!" he cried. "There is something crooked and it's easy enough to see that Dick Daresome is the one to be benefited by a crooked game. I demand in behalf of my fellow-students that Daresome be excluded from the match!"

Dick laughed without a particle of fear.

"Well, if you think you can queer me out of the credit for what I have done, just go ahead and try. I have a different opinion of the judge and scorers."

The professor turned toward Daresome reassuringly.

"I know a thing or two, and I only need a bit of absolute proof to have more than a case of mere circumstantial evidence. I am sure of the guilty party."

"Is it meant that I am under suspicion?" cried Percy Herron with braggart self-assertion.

The crowd of supporters with him now came to his aid gallantly.

"No! No! No!"

"You are all right, Herron!"

"Put Daresome out of the game!"

"Forfeit the match!"

Such were their cheers, but it was evident to Dick that the whole scheme had been carefully rehearsed beforehand.

"All I need is complete evidence," continued the professor, "and I will punish the guilty party. Have any of you chaps seen anything suspicious about this matter? Are you willing to see your schoolmate defrauded out of the credit he has so skilfully earned?"

There was a silence.

Then Clayton spoke up, with ominous glances at Dick:

"Professor, I saw Daresome talking with that marker during the little rest you gave us. I had my suspicions, but I didn't want to say anything."

This was too much for Chigger Howard, standing near by.

"I wouldn't mind so much losing my bet on a straight

match, but I don't intend to be defrauded out of it," thought he. "I will take a little hand in this squabble myself."

He pushed aside the crowding lads and forced a way up to the little center group.

"Professor, I have something to say about this," said he. "I can give you a little information!"

At these words a change was seen to come over the confident faces of Herron and Clayton.

"You keep out of this, you sneak!" cried Clayton menacingly, shaking a hard and heavy fist in the face of Howard.

But the youth was unaffected now, for he had a hundred dollars at stake. He did not intend to lose it, either.

"Professor Watts, there is a crooked game here, and I won't stand by and see it worked. In the first place, I know of a hundred dollars being bet by two students on this game."

Clayton gasped at this bold step.

"I won't tell who it is," said Howard, "but it is one reason why a certain clique is trying to keep Dick Daresome out of the finish. And I know that some money was passed to that marker from the village during the intermission."

"There, what did I tell you?" cried Herron impudently.

"Yes, you are the one who did tell me—by your actions instead of your words," said Howard, pointing toward Herron. "There stands the fellow, boys, who has tried to degrade Merrivale Academy sport by bribing the official who had charge of the target!"

"O-o-o-o-oh!" went up a great groan from the big mass of the students.

"Throw him out!" cried several of Dick's supporters.

Herron saw that he had at last met his Waterloo in this campaign.

"You had better leave this part of the grounds at once, young man," said the professor. "We have had enough of this sort of thing. You go to your room and await a summons from the principal."

Herron tried to wriggle out of the matter even this late, true to his snaky nature.

"But I can explain," he started to say.

"That's all right. You go right to your room now, and you can think up a better explanation there by the time you are sent for to appear before the teachers."

Herron dejectedly went away with a pale face, while Nash Clayton turned away to avoid the professor's keen glance.

"You say there has been big betting on this match?" asked the professor.

"Yes, sir," said Howard, "I can prove it, but as I already gave this information, I don't think you ought to ask more. Anyway, it was straight betting, from what I

know, and I think that just as a punishment for these would-be crooks the match ought to proceed. If it does they will lose their money."

The professor pondered, and then gave a laugh.

"I believe you are right, although it is my real duty to look into this matter, too. But if they lose their money it will be a real punishment enough. So we will let it go at that."

He gave a significant glance at Clayton, who fairly writhed under the piercing, accusing look.

"I wish I had some evidence against you," said the professor sarcastically. "I am positive that you had the biggest share in this business. But time will tell—time and maybe other students."

Clayton trembled, for he saw that all chance of using the betting information against Howard had been cleverly taken out of his reach. Instead he was now in the other's power.

"Go on with the match!" said the professor, and Dick stepped back to his position on the firing line.

Bang!

Our hero sent a well-directed shot which hit the very center of the bull's-eye.

"Hurrray!" yelled Sam Thorpe, unable to restrain himself, even though he was one of the officials of the shoot, and should have kept a discreet silence.

"Now, I want that examined carefully," said Dick, "so that there will be no question as to who won this match."

The judge nodded.

The officials all had a look at the target and agreed that it was a good clean score.

"Stand back!" yelled Dick.

Then one after another he completed the shots of his turn. By clever calculation of the twist of his sight he managed to land every shot where it belonged.

"Daresome! Daresome forever!" cried his friends.

Clayton with pale face and perspiring forehead took his turn.

It was evident that the bully had lost his nerve.

Bang!

The shot went wild, entirely missing the target.

Once more he tried, with worse luck.

"There's no use in trying for this thing, with every one trying to queer me!" cried Nash Clayton, throwing his gun on the sod.

"Ho! ho!" cried Chigger Howard. "Who is the quitter now, my fresh friend?"

Clayton glared at him, and there was only one course of action left to the enraged fellow. He fired the rest of his shots with hands trembling with hatred.

His score was zero.

A great laugh went up from the Merrivale students

about him, for he was not the most popular chap who had ever attended a boarding-school.

His great bodily strength and fighting ability—of the bully variety—had made him feared.

But the new champion was fast making a joke of Clayton's pretensions.

"Rotten!" yelled Skinniman Perkins.

"Get the hook!" shouted Wallace Clark.

"Run him behind the barn!" screeched another partisan.

Clayton whirled about toward the jeering crowd with a look of terrific hatred.

"I'll square you fellows for this!" he shouted.

"It'll be the first square thing you've done for some time," laughed Chigger Howard.

Clayton rushed at him, unable to bear the taunts any longer.

"Oh, you're the yellow cur who peached on us, are you?" he hissed. "Well, you'll look more like an overripe tomato than a peach by the time I get through with you, my merry soul! Take that and that!"

He swung his rifle, butt end up, straight at the head of the offending Chigger Howard.

It would have been a fractured skull for that lad, if Dick Daresome had not stepped into the mix-up.

CHAPTER V.

A RUNAWAY AUTOMOBILE.

"Whoa!" yelled Dick, as if he had been talking to a bad horse, but instead of putting a hand on the reins he swung up against the gun of the enraged Clayton.

Bang!

Bump! Biff!

How the splinters flew as Dick's metal barrel struck against the butt of Clayton's weapon.

"Enough of that, boys!" shouted Professor Watts, rushing up to the interlocked duo.

Dick had hold of Clayton's throat with one hand, as he shoved upward to the left with the other containing his gun.

Clayton was pummeling at Dick's face with his own free hand. But as the professor intercepted, it seemed that he lost all control of himself.

He pulled back, and had it not been for Daresome's quick follow-up he would have swung the gun-butt on the professor's head.

Bump!

Just in time did Dick give the frantic, half-crazed lad a wind-killing poke in the pit of the stomach.

"Oh!" gasped Clayton.

He doubled up and sank to the ground, groaning for breath, as if he had been given a dose of some sort of laughing gas. The only difference was that his expression had nothing whatever to do with laughing.

"Wallop him, Dick!" cried Chester Brown.

The lame lad was generally as gentle as a lamb, but Clayton had been one of his persistent persecutors, and it was only human nature for him to desire a just punishment.

Dick, however, tempered his punishing with honest justice, and stood back.

"Boys!" began the professor, excited beyond measure.

He looked so angry that each minute the lads expected him to take a hand at pummeling Clayton himself.

"There, there, professor!" said Dick. "I'll attend to our nimble friend here. He won't juggle any more guns as long as I am drilling with this company."

Clayton pulled himself to his feet with a look of deepest hatred and chagrin.

"You've got every one against me, Daresome," said he; "but I'll get even with you yet! You wait until next week!"

Dick laughed as he stepped back into the lines back of the marksmen's positions.

"I'm interested in this tournament, and next week can take care of itself."

Dick's words seemed to give the professor an idea.

"Young man, I won't have you expelled from this Academy as you deserve, for it would break your mother's and father's hearts. Instead you will spend all of the coming week in your room, except at recitation times. I will order the meals taken to your room, and if you leave the building except for classes I will have you expelled, and see that you are not admitted to any other boarding-school in this part of the country."

Clayton winced at this severe punishment. But there was nothing for him to say.

He snatched up his gun, looked at the shattered butt, where Daresome's skilful blow had left a gentle reminder. Then he walked up to the dormitory with thoughts that looked, to judge from his face, to be not exactly adapted for publication on these pages.

"Go on with the tournament," said the professor.

He forced himself to be calm after this little excitement, and the others of the big crowd followed his example.

"Steady now, boys," said Dick, forgetting that they were his own competitors. They were Merrivales, and that was enough for Dick. He wanted them all to score well—good sport that he was in every contest.

The rest of the marksmen did pull themselves together by a strong effort, and behold! his two friends led the rest, following not so far behind Dick's own score.

The contest was ended, and with the last report a great shout went up for the winner.

It did not need the stentorian tones of the herald to tell them who had won.

"Hurrah for Daresome!"

"Dick, you're a wonder!" cried Chester.

The lads crowded around the blushing youth, shoving their hands forward with merry shouts.

"Up with him!" cried several of his own fellow-contestants, and before the lad knew what was happening he had been bundled up on to the shoulders of the cheering boys.

Straight up the slope to the dormitory they lugged him, whooping like Indians, and one would have supposed that he had won some sort of victory against a rival school instead of a simple trophy for himself.

But there was a curious reason for their enthusiasm.

The American schoolboy of to-day is a great lover of fair play, and he is not ashamed to show his feelings on the subject.

Chigger Howard expressed it to another lad.

"I don't think I'm so crazy about Daresome, but I must say he did trim old Clayton and Herron to-day, and there's a good reason to cheer him."

Then he smiled to himself.

"I guess I've got a little reason to cheer myself, too," thought Howard to himself. "But I'll let well enough alone. I'll just keep the copy of that betting agreement for a few days to see if Clayton will pony up. Then if not there will be some excitement in Denmark."

Dick and his friends reached the dormitory entrance, and while they stood there chatting the principal of the school walked up.

He addressed Dick on the steps, tearing away some tissue paper from an object in his hand.

"Dick Daresome," said the principal, "I was kept in my office on Academy business during the tournament, but I have received reports from the affair."

Dick flushed and looked most embarrassed, for he never hankered for the position of hero.

The principal smiled at his manly confusion.

"There's no need of your blushing," said the kindly official, "because I'm not going to do anything except hand you this elk-head trophy. You can get your name put on it in the village this afternoon, if you like."

Dick took the prize, while the lads about him cheered.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Principal," said Dick.

"I'm only sorry that my winning should have robbed my friends who were in the match."

"You can't all win," said the principal, "and I know of no student in this Academy who I would rather see take it away."

He left them with a wave of his hand, while Dick started upstairs with the trophy.

Chester, Sam, Alan and Skinniman sat around with him to compare notes on the battle in the room.

Then Dick thought it a good time to give a confidential narrative of the affair in the morning.

"Aren't you going to report that, Dick?" asked Alan. "I think those fellows ought to be fired from the school."

Dick shook his head decidedly.

"Not by a jugful—I'm no squealer, boys. Besides, I think that they will get what's coming to them from the principal, anyway. I know I'd hate to have to stay indoors for a week in great baseball weather like this."

The others looked out of the window.

"That's so," said Sam. "Why don't you take that trophy up to the Merrivale Village jeweler and have it engraved?"

It was a good scheme.

"Right you are, Sam," said our hero. "I'll do it right away, for you never can be sure of the future."

Dick was indeed right. His own future was saving up a surprise to be delivered to him within half an hour, but it naturally didn't worry him at the time.

One of the finest things about life is that we are kept in ignorance of unpleasant things until they happen—that is, unless one happens to be a fortune-teller, which must be a most discouraging sort of a profession.

"We'll all go as a body-guard," said Skinniman, and they started up the short cut toward the Village together.

It was a clear, warm afternoon, and the boys straggled along across the meadow, chatting to each other.

As they reached the turnpike which connected Merrivale Village with Belleville Village, on the other side of the Greenvale River, they heard a series of queer, sharp reports.

"What under the sun is that?" asked Alan.

"Somebody must be having a rival shooting match," laughed Sam.

Suddenly around the curve of the road came a speeding automobile. It was a big red car, and it cast up a cloud of dust and smoke from its unconsumed oil.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The explosions were coming from the car itself, as it sped toward them. The lads knew that something was wrong with the "internal workings," and they leaped back against the fence.

It was none too soon.

Like a thing of life the auto was upon them, and suddenly it seemed to stop and buck like an unruly broncho.

The boys saw that a girl was sitting in the front seat, trying to steer the car, while in the rear were two elderly women, screaming with fear.

"I don't blame them," thought Dick.

The auto had stopped, and then the wheels began revolving in the reverse direction.

Now it was backing toward the ditch.

If it reached the other side of the road they would all be turned over, and probably suffer a terrible death under the upturned car.

"Steer straight backward!" yelled Dick Daresome to the frightened girl.

She was white and frightened, yet with it all she maintained her pluck, as the lads admiringly saw.

She swung at the wheel of the machine and as best she could directed it so that it would back along the roadway.

"Look out, it is going forward!" cried Dick, who had ridden many times in the automobile of one of his old schoolmates in New York City.

Whizz! Zip!

The machinery rattled, and the reports from the engine increased in violence. The elderly women let loose with frightful cries of terror.

"That girl's going to get killed!" muttered Dick. "She's not even in the seat for the chauffeur!"

His quick eye had noted the fact that the girl was sitting in the seat at the side of the auto driver's place.

Something had evidently happened to this individual, and Dick did not need to be told that the plucky girl was doing her best.

"Shut off the speed!" yelled Daresome to her, as the car started forward again.

She pulled at the first handle in sight, and the uproar of the machinery began again. She did not strike the right throttle.

"Well, there's only one thing to do to prevent a murder now," mused Dick. "I'll have to use what little knowledge I have, for I can see that poor girl has none at all about a motor."

He swung the precious trophy to Sam Thorpe, who stood near by watching with fascinated eyes the tragic happenings on the road before them.

"Here, Sam, I'm going to help!"

Without another word Dick made a run and leaped into the seat of the chauffeur.

A spare tire was fastened to the side of the car, and over this Dick Daresome had to leap. But he was capable of such a feat, for the youth was in perfect condition.

"Oh!" gasped the girl in surprise, as the Merrivale student landed at her side.

"Help! Murder!" screamed one of the ladies in the rear, while the other improved the opportunity to faint.

"Shut up!" cried Dick. "I'm no robber—I'm trying to save you instead."

His words were cut off by a sudden series of snorts from the erratic engine. The girl's endeavors had put the machinery completely out of order. It spurted forward now, with Dick's firm hands on the wheel. The automobile was running away!

CHAPTER VI.

A MOTOR RACE WITH DEATH.

Dick had leaped to the assistance just in time.

The car dashed down the road in the direction of the bridge over the Greenvale River.

"Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish," thought Dick, as he clung to the throbbing wheel.

The machinery seemed to take on more power as the great red car leaped along the road.

Several chickens and turkeys from a farmhouse near the road rushed across the road.

It is a matter of scientific fact that no matter what side of a road a chicken is on, it always feels duty-bound to cross to the other side in front of a fast-running vehicle.

"Shoo!" muttered Dick under his breath, half-unconsciously, but the fowls escaped the wheels of the racing auto as if by a miracle.

"This machine is surely on a rampage," said Dick to his fair companion. "What's the row?"

Speeding as they were, the girl pulled herself together and gave him a clear answer.

"Our chauffeur was under the car in the Village trying to fix it when the machine ran away. You came just in time," said she with grateful tones.

"Well, I'm not such a much," said Dick. "But, anyway, I know these roads along here, and maybe I can help on the steering so that the machine won't carry you into the river."

At this instant the car rushed along the road toward the bridge.

A team was crossing on the bridge, and was just about in the middle of the roadway.

It seemed certain that the speeding car would run into it, and try as he would Dick could exert no control over the brake or the speed regulator.

Honk! Honk! Honk!

Dick squeezed the auto horn's rubber bulb, and the grating sound rasped out on the afternoon air.

The driver of the team in fright dragged back on his horse just in time to get the animal out of the way.

The car whizzed across the bridge with growing speed, while Dick held a steady hand on the wheel.

"That was about as near as I want to get," muttered Dick, but he was destined to have even more excitement in the next few minutes, for all the levers were out of order.

Down the turnpike toward Belleville whizzed the machine, and Dick still vainly tried to pull in on the rate of speed, but the engine was working away at terrible power, and he saw that there was only one course to follow.

"I must just steer this runaway until it runs down!" exclaimed Dick.

This was a terrible and nerve-racking task before the lad, but he never lost his nerve.

Tightly he clung with tense hands, and straight as a die along the hard road the car went. Now they were entering the streets of quiet Belleville Village.

"Oh, I know we'll run over some poor soul!" groaned the girl in an anguish of apprehension.

Dick did not fear for himself, but he, too, was in fear of crushing out some life, and his feelings were indescribable, for he knew that in the clutch of those ten fingers he held perhaps the safety of several human lives, as well as the soundness and perhaps the lives of his fellow-passengers.

"This is the worst thing I've ever been in," muttered our hero to himself. "Well, there's no use crying over spilt milk. I'm here and I'd better make the most of it."

So he did.

Along under the swaying shade trees of the quiet village street they raced.

Children and grown-ups yelled at them.

Dogs ran barking out before them, but prudently wriggled out of the path in time to avoid being made into sausage meat by the crunching wheels.

Finally Dick saw a solitary figure standing in the middle of the street.

Our hero could tell even in that hasty glance that it was the Belleville constable, with whom he had had several one-sided interviews in the past.

Dick chuckled to himself.

"Stop thar!" bellowed the constable of this enterprising village.

But the machine did not stop. Instead it raced right toward him, and Dick gave the horn a series of impudent toots and honks which rent the air.

The constable jumped back with a howl of fright as the car grazed his clothes.

Then he ran angrily after the car, trying to read the number of the automobile.

Dick dismissed this gentleman from his mind now, for before him was a much more serious problem.

The long street, ending up at a fork in the road, became narrower and harder to navigate at the great speed with which they were traveling. Dick realized that in another second or two he would have the difficulty of making a turn at the fork, where the street was narrow and probably crowded with vehicles standing before the Belleville blacksmith shop.

His heart gave a jump.

There before him he saw the turning of the road, just as he had feared, with several teams and buggies blocking the passage.

"I'll thread them if human skill can do it!" muttered

Dick gallantly. He tightened his determined hold on the wheel. Now he gave it a quick wrench to the right.

The auto slewed to the right, and just grazed a double team.

"Next tack!" grunted Dick, squinting along at the dangerous road before him.

A jerk to the left and the machine wriggled in between two rearing teams.

It was a shave indeed.

They just missed a smash-up, and now Dick breathed easier, as he whirled the great car in a big sliding, dust-raising curve around the turn in the thoroughfare.

They were now going down the road toward the distant railroad tracks of the main line.

Had he realized this he would have turned the other way, for Dick Daresome knew the danger of those tracks, when the afternoon passenger and freight trains were due.

But nothing could now be done but to go.

"Oh, look at that train coming! I hope we don't go near a crossing!" cried the girl at his side.

The unmanageable motor whirled along, and Dick knew that unluckily they were going straight toward a crossing.

Would it be at the fatal moment when the train was crossing the road?

"I hope not!" muttered Dick, but he knew better. He was really trying to reassure himself, for this was a test of his own nerves that was hard to stand.

On, on they sped.

Toot! toot! toot!

The engineer on the locomotive had spied the whirling automobile and was trying to warn the riders to curb their speed. He did not realize that they were helpless, except in the ability to steer the car in general directions.

The road led straight down to the railroad track.

The train and the auto seemed to be racing to the meeting place, and death seemed to be shoving each onward with grim determination to have it a tie heat.

Dick was in a quandary.

"What in the name of goodness can I do?" he muttered.

The space between himself and the distant railroad crossing was being shortened every minute, and yet there seemed no alternative because the road was narrow and led straight down to the track, with a high fence on either side.

"I'll try running the car into the fence and swinging on a great big curve into the meadow," thought Dick.

Then he remembered that at such a speed as they were making the hitting of a fence would mean a somersault for the car and almost certain death for them.

The car was now whizzing with increasing speed, and Dick saw that a bare fraction of hope was before them.

The controller of the auto he saw was not quite shoved up to the highest notch of speed.

"This car's been going at a pretty wild rate already,"

said Dick in a low voice which his companion did not even hear. "Maybe I can put on a little more juice!"

He knew that the throttle or controller would not work to reduce the speed, owing to some injury to the machinery.

Yet it might work the other way, and so he did try.

Brrr!

The wheels rattled, the unmuffled auto let forth a new variety of sharp reports and spurted forward with frightful velocity toward the railroad track.

The engineer guessed that something was wrong and whistled for "Down brakes!"

There was but a fraction of time in which to act. Yet the little instant was what saved them.

For the locomotive was slowed up just a fraction, and the auto sped forward still faster. The result was that they cleared the cowcatcher of the locomotive by such a narrow margin that Dick's iron nerve went by the board.

And when Dick Daresome's nerve went it was a sure sign of the happening of the unusual.

"Oh!" he gasped, as he sank back in the padded leather seat, "that was awful!"

The poor chap was only human.

There is a limit to the wear and tear that any nerves can stand, and poor Dick held himself up by main will power. His muscular strength seemed to have fled completely.

Yet he did manage to hold the steering wheel of the auto straight, and the car sped along.

"Thank the lucky stars it's uphill!" said Daresome, and the steepness of the declivity increased. The road wound around and around, and the higher it went up the slope the more the speed of the automobile decreased.

Hill-climbing will take the speed out of any machine; it is safe to say, because of the strain on the gear.

Dick knew this and realized that here was their chance of salvation.

"Oh, young man, take us down that road!" cried the elderly woman on the right of the rear seat. She was able to use her voice again.

"No, ma'am, not on your life—and not for your life!" said our hero. "We must take this upper fork, where it's the steepest and let the hill force this runaway machine to come to a stop. It's our only hope."

This was true, as Dick soon demonstrated.

He took a turn to the left, and in another couple of minutes brought the throbbing automobile to a stop.

By a supreme muscular effort, after having been restored to his strength again by the rest of the peaceful uphill climb, Dick pulled back the controller.

The machine came to a full stop.

"Now, we've got the crazy brute under control!" laughed our hero, with the tension removed.

He leaped over the side and twisted the lever that he knew would do the work.

The throbbing ceased and the engine seemed to die down entirely.

"There, throw on the lock brake," said Dick, pointing out the safety appliance, "to keep the car from rolling back down the hill."

The girl did so, and Dick put some big stones under the car to keep it still more secure.

Then he stood by to help the ladies out.

"Oh, what a terrible escape!" exclaimed one of them, whose looks indicated that she was the girl's mother.

The other one, who proved to be an aunt, was still more relieved, but she was so weak from fright at the recent exciting race with death, that Dick had to half-carry her from the machine to a seat on a big fallen tree by the roadside. *she must have come out of*

"Now, you can rest there, while we think up some plan to get your chauffeur," said practical-minded Dick.

"Oh, how can we ever thank you?" cried the girl's mother. *her faint page 12*

But our hero silenced her with a smiling gesture.

"Please don't try, or I'll be sorry," said Dick. "You are in a pretty pickle now, but I think I have a solution."

CHAPTER VII.

A DARING DODGE BY DARESOME.

"Now, if you are left here on this hillside," said Dick, "it means this car will be ruined, and there's no way to get your man word as to your location, unless I can work my scheme."

"What is that—can we help you?" asked the girl. "You were so quick and brave!"

Daresome flushed.

"If you say things like that I'll forget my scheme. But it is just this—to hunt up some farmer near here—I think I see a house over there on that hillside—and try to get him to lend me a team or a buggy to go down the road after your chauffeur."

The ladies nodded.

"That's fine," said the mother.

"Yes, you do think them all out so quickly!" said the girl with an admiring glance at Daresome's earnest, handsome face.

Dick shook his head.

"It's not as easy as you think," said he. "These farmers around here are as tight as the bark on a tree."

"Well, what's that got to do with it?" asked the girl, surprised. "Can't you hire a team from them?"

Dick looked embarrassed.

"I might if I had the money, but—but—you know I was just taking a walk from the Academy to the Village, and I didn't have a red copper in my pockets."

The girl's mother interposed.

"Well, of course, we don't expect you to do the hiring when it's all our fault. And I suppose this ought to be enough to hire a team with."

She reached inside her automobile cloak and drew forth a pocketbook.

From this she took forth a roll of yellow-backs—tens, and twenties, and fifties—that made Dick's eyes open a little wider in spite of his usual calm.

"Well, I should say it would!" laughed our hero. "You could buy the county and a red schoolhouse thrown in to boot for that much money, if I'm any good as a long-distance judger!"

"Then take this and get a team at once, and drive down as you suggest."

The excited lady handed him the whole roll, which must have amounted to several hundred dollars. Dick could see by her handsome diamonds and those on the other two that these people were immensely wealthy.

To many a fellow here would have been the temptation at least to overcharge them on the matter and make a few dollars, but Dick was not of that sort.

"Just give me one of those fives, if you have one," said he, "and let the young lady walk over there with me, to see that I work it all right. There's no need of giving them a cent more than that."

The mother nodded, handed him the money, and then Dick and the pretty girl started toward the farmhouse.

They could not resist the opportunity for talking after such a strange introduction by Fate.

"So you go to Merrivale Academy, do you?" asked the girl.

"Yes," said Dick, "and that's the best academy in the country, to my way of thinking."

"I wish I were a boy instead of a silly girl," said she. "You have so much fun, and my life is all tied down, with a maid or a governess always tagging along behind me. I never have a moment's peace."

"My name is Daresome—with Dick as the handle," said our hero, as they wound along the lane leading to the cozy farmhouse near by.

"I'm glad to meet you," she said, holding out her hand simply and frankly. "My name is Helen Ashbilt, and I'm from New York City."

Dick's breath quickened, for he knew this girl belonged to one of the richest families in the world.

"I am from New York, too," said Dick, "but it's an awfully big place."

He looked at her with wonder, although too polite to

show it. She seemed just like any other girl, as sweet and unaffected as if she were from some modest cottage instead of a great marble palace on Fifth Avenue.

"Who would think this girl had more money in her own name than I can ever earn in a lifetime—enough to build a city of her own?" thought Dick.

He realized, as never before, that people are all more or less alike, and that the presence or the lacking of great wealth cannot make any real difference in the looks or disposition of a person.

"Well, here we are at the farmhouse," said Dick, coming back to earth from his thoughts.

He walked to the kitchen door and knocked.

At first there was no reply.

Again he essayed.

Finally a pleasant voice answered from the depths of the kitchen. Dick could tell from the savory odors that emanated from the shady doorway that supper was being prepared.

"Hello thar! What is it ye want?"

A young farmer's wife came to the door with a tow-headed youngster toddling at her side.

"Is your husband about?" asked Dick.

At first she drew back in partial alarm, and then she saw the reassuring, sweet-faced girl.

"Wall, he's out on the pasture bringin' home the cows," said she. "Kin I do anythin' fer ye?"

"We just want to hire a buggy and a horse," said Dick. "There are some ladies out on the roadway who have lost their own driver from an automobile, and I want to go back for him."

As Dick was talking the farmer returned, swinging briskly down from the direction of the barn.

"Howdee, neighbor?" said he.

Dick and the girl bowed, and Daresome again told his wants. At first the man looked dubious. For all he knew these people might be clever swindlers.

He had heard of the artfulness of city folks, and these two were evidently such.

"Wall, I cain't exactly see as how I kin spare the old mare," said the farmer slowly, looking at them with suspicion.

"Try this as a spectacle and see if you can see it any better now," said Daresome, laughing merrily.

He drew forth the five-dollar bill.

"We'll pay you this for the use of the rig, and you'll admit this is the price of a good many bushels of potatoes."

Here was reasoning indeed.

"Wall, what guarnty hev I thet you'll bring it back?" asked the farmer, beginning to melt.

"You come right back on the roadway and sit guard on that automobile—it's worth about ten thousand dollars, and I guess that will be guarantee enough," said Dick.

The farmer was now won over.

He had seen very few automobiles, and human nature couldn't resist the enormous sum of five dollars in real money, after a hard winter.

"All right; I'll hitch fer ye!"

In a few minutes a peaceful-looking gray mare was harnessed in the old buggy, and the farmer handed Dick the reins with a smile.

"Here, we'll pay you in advance, then you're sure of that, and you can hold the automobile for the rest. Get in and we'll drive you down there."

Dick's words were followed, and the girl, the farmer and our hero all started down the lane toward the main road, where the auto was marooned.

"Whoa!" said Dick to the horse suddenly. He leaned back and shouted over the back of the buggy, "Hey, there, ma'am, I think you'd better get up some ham and eggs and coffee for those ladies. They're pretty hungry about this time, I'll bet, and they'll pay you for it."

Then he started on.

"You're very thoughtful," said the girl.

"Not at all," responded Dick. "I just know what I'd want done myself. It gets you hungry riding around through these country lanes at sixty miles an hour."

They drew up at the side of the automobile now, and the farmer leaped out.

"Ladies," said Dick, "this gentleman is renting me his buggy to go down for your chauffeur. He will watch over your machine while you go into his farmhouse for some supper if you want."

The man nodded politely.

Needless to say the ladies were anxious to get a little relaxation and supper as well.

"I'd better ride on with this young man, so I'll know Louie, the chauffeur. He might not be able to see him, or at least to recognize him."

The girl did not seem displeased at the prospect of riding down with Dick.

"Well, Helen, do so then," said her mother. "If I ever get out of this scrape alive I will never try another wild-goose chase through the country with a chauffeur who can only speak French, and who hasn't sense enough to run a sprinkling wagon, let alone an automobile."

Dick laughed, and started off down the roadway with the charming girl at his side.

It was quite a little drive to Belleville Village, but as they drove into the town Dick saw some familiar figures.

"Hello, Dick!" called a merry voice.

It was that of Grace Gray, his sweetheart's roommate at the Greenvale Academy for Girls.

Bess Morrison herself was close behind the other.

"Hello, girls!" sung out Daresome politely, and he chuckled inwardly at the expression on Bess's face.

It was first amazement, and then chagrin, and finally positive displeasure.

"Why, Dick Daresome!" she exclaimed, but before the sound of her voice had died out our hero was well under way and out of view.

"Bess, I guess you have a rival," laughed Grace teasingly, with a comical look at the pretty, little dark-eyed coquette.

Bess flushed and shook her head independently.

"Well, I'll show him—there are others, too. But I wonder who she can be? I don't think she was at all pretty, do you?"

Grace and the other two girls with her now started out on a campaign of teasing.

"Oh, but she had such pretty eyes!" commented one.

"And wasn't her skin white?" added another.

"And such a beautiful hat!" put in a third.

"She is a beauty!" said Grace.

This was too much for Bess, who was only human, and very much feminine. She flounced off to the other side of the village street and refused to have anything further to do with the girls.

Bess could not fathom the mystery—Dick out riding with another girl!

She herself had often given him a taste of jealousy with the lads of Belleville Academy, the rival institution to Merrivale. But she herself had had no real rivals, because there was only one girls' school to two for boys.

"Well, I'll not have anything to do with him—I won't speak a word to him until he explains this," she said to herself with a most becoming pair of pouting lips.

Then she started on back to the Academy building, the girls' school, which was located on an island in the middle of the Greenvale River, further down the stream.

Meantime Dick and his pretty charge were driving peacefully down the street, when the village constable of Belleville stepped forth.

"Hey, thar, ain't you the young man who was driving that there autymobile?" he cried.

The old fellow's vision had been keener and quicker than Dick had imagined.

But our hero was not taken aback.

"I certainly am not," he replied. "Does this look much like a touring car?"

The old fellow was not to be fooled, however.

"That's the girl that was settin' with ye," said he. "I recollect ye both! Ye're under arrest for exceedin' the speed limit!"

Dick was thunderstruck. He had not counted on such quick retribution. Besides the car had been a runaway, and if he were put into custody now it would make a tangle which could not be explained in a week.

The constable stood forth to block the way. Then Dick decided to take matters in his own hands.

"Stand back there, you old fossil!" yelled Dick.

The constable, angered at the word of which he didn't really know the meaning, drew his mace.

He was ready for action.

But so was Daresome.

"If you block my way you'll suffer for it," said Dick.

"I am not breaking any law, but driving along attending to my own business, as I should."

The constable did not budge.

He reached forward a hand to hold the mare's reins.

"You take your hand off that horse's head," said Dick.

"I've got real business to attend to, and I don't intend to be stopped here by you."

The constable glared malignantly.

But Dick was not abashed.

"Get up there, Nancy Hanks!" called our hero to the horse, which started forth, as he rattled the reins and clucked to her.

"Stop in the name of the law!" bellowed the constable.

"I know who you are—you are Dick Daresome from Mer-rivale. I'm goin' ter run you in on suspicion."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Dick. "Get up, Nancy, and run over the old fossil!"

The constable leaped aside just in time to avoid being run over.

Dick struck the mare with the whip, and she dashed away as fast as she could. The constable ran alongside, and Dick laughed in his face.

"I'll get ye!" cried the village official, and he ran to the livery stable at the side of the road.

But Dick was not waiting for any further particulars or any new complications.

He pulled the rein suddenly and the horse was turned down a side street.

Meanwhile the constable had been lost sight of.

Dick dashed on, with his mare well under control, to the next corner, and then he turned her again to the direction of the distant bridge over the Greenvale River, about a mile and a half away.

"Oh, this is terrible!" gasped Helen Ashbilt. "I wish we had our machine—we could leave them behind in a jiffy. But this old poky horse is so slow."

Dick laughed.

"Well, I'll do my best with what I have in stock," said he, touching the horse with the whip.

The buggy sped along the street swaying and wobbling, for it was not used to such mad speed.

The outskirts of the town were reached, and they were just turning into the long straight road which led to the river, when Dick heard a galloping of hoofs behind him.

"Get along there, Maude S.!" cried he, and then he turned to look over his shoulder.

There not a hundred yards behind him came the resolute constable, on horseback, yelling like a cowboy, and waving his club high in the air.

"I'll git ye!" he yelled. "I'll git ye!"

"Not if the court knows herself," said Dick, and he lashed the horse. But the constable was gaining rapidly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW COMPLICATION.

Dick Daresome swung the whip around the side of the speeding buggy in a manner which made the constable sit up and take notice.

"That ought to help the old duffer," muttered Dick Daresome, and it certainly did.

The lash curled about the man's neck and face.

He gave vent to a frightful yell.

"W-wow-w! Ouch! Murder!"

The constable's horse was speeding along the side of the buggy, but Dick saw now that it was an easy matter to get rid of the fellow if he tried.

"You villin!" yelled the official, "I'll have ye arrested fer attempt ter kill me!"

Dick laughed and reached about for another stroke with the whip.

This time the effect was unexpected, but just as satisfactory to Dick and the girl at his side.

Biff!

Swish!

The lash cut the constable's steed and the animal, rearing, came nearer the buggy.

"Take this one, too!" said Dick, justified in his own tactics by the attempt of the constable to strike him with the heavy mace or club which he bore.

Daresome now brought the lash across the animal's flank with all his might.

"Help! Police!" yelled this doughty constable, as if he had been a spinster lady being robbed of a pet cat.

The horse swung toward the fence at the side of the road. The animal gave a lunge as the frightened rider clung with might and main to the reins, and then over went the constable.

High up he shot, and then over the fence into a field of closely growing grain.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Dick, for he saw that the officer would be unharmed by his fall.

This was true.

The horse galloped on a few feet, and then turned for a record-breaking race with himself for the home stable.

Dick slowed down the speed of the panting mare, and looked back with twinkling eyes.

"Oh, you constable!" shouted our friend amid his merry peals of laughter.

"I'll git ye when ye return!" howled the discomfited officer of Belleville Village.

"Nix on that," said Dick, "for I won't return. I'm going across the country to another county, and you can't do a thing to me!"

So with another laugh for the angry constable, Dick let his own steed shorten the distance between the spot and the bridge over the Greenvale.

"Aren't you afraid of that mean old policeman?" asked Helen Ashbilt.

"Not by a long sight," said Dick. "He is only one of these jay cops, anyway, and Belleville is a village where it isn't safe for a Merrivale student to go, anyway."

"What do you mean?" asked the pretty heiress. "You didn't seem to mind going there with our automobile a while ago."

Daresome laughed.

"I couldn't help it—your automobile had made up its mind and there was no time for arguing with that crazy machine. But where can your chauffeur be, I wonder?"

They crossed the bridge. Dick breathed easier, for now he was on home territory again.

On they drove until at last they came to the very spot where Dick had left his three friends.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" laughed Dick.

The little group was still there. With them was a little, short, scrawny-looking foreigner.

"That's Louie, our chauffeur!" cried Helen.

"That's my bunch of friends," said Dick. "I wonder what they are talking about? Let's butt into that interesting-looking conversation."

The buggy drove up very close to the excited quartet before the lads spied their comrade.

"There you are, Dick!"

"This is great!"

"Golly! we're glad you came back, old boy!"

Thus he was greeted.

The little chauffeur spied the young girl, and with a shout of joy he dashed toward her side and began rattling off a dozen queries in French.

The girl answered him volubly.

"Well, that's traveling some!" muttered Skinniman, as he listened to the conversation.

"What's the matter, boys?" asked Dick, as he sprang out of the rig. "What have you been doing here all this time?"

"We've been trying to talk to this fellow."

"Yes, Dick," added Sam Thorpe, "I thought I had studied French. But I guess this rascal hasn't, for he couldn't understand a word I said to him."

Daresome laughed.

"That's pretty tough, sure enough, Sam; but think of the way he must have felt to hear you butchering French."

Dick now turned toward the girl, motioning to the chauffeur to enter the rig.

"Well, Miss Ashbilt, I must leave you here, for I've a lot to do up at Merrivale Village."

"Oh, and won't we see each other again?" she asked with evident regret.

Daresome turned red as he heard his friends giggle behind him.

"Well, I know I'm willing," he began, "but—excuse me. I forget to present my roommate and some other friends."

He introduced the boys, and how their eyes popped out when they heard the famous well-known name.

"You can get back safely to that farmhouse, and from there ought to have no difficulty in getting on with your trip. Louie can stop eating frogs long enough to fix up the car," said Dick.

The girl held out a white little hand.

"Well, we never can thank you enough, and I hope that some time when you are in New York you will come and see us. You will find that we are not as terrible, disagreeable people as some folks may say."

Dick took the proffered grasp with cordial warmth.

"Well, some day I will, and I wish you a pleasant tour for the rest of your trip. Good-night."

"Good-night," she said, and drove back down the roadway toward Belleville.

"Now, Dick," said Skinniman, "what does all this mean? Don't you know that you are apt to be censured by the Merrivale boys for bobbing around the country in an auto with millionaires?"

Daresome laughed.

"And, say, Dick, you'd better never let Bess Morrison hear of this or there will be a regular Revolutionary War!" said Sam with great earnestness.

Dick's mirth was increased.

"The news on that quarter is all out, Sam," said he, "for Bess saw me. But I guess it will do her good—that's the trouble with all those Academy girls."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that they are so used to being the main thing here around these two Academies for boys that they take us all for granted."

"Correct," said Skinniman. "I may be fat, but I know one or two things about girls. I'll bet that you get a better stand-in with Bess for this than anything really worth while that you've done so far."

Sam nodded, but he was curious for details.

He picked up the precious rifle trophy from the ground where the excited boys had dropped it. Then he turned to Dick with a questioning expression.

"Antonio, tell us your story," said Sam with an expectant look.

Then Dick told them a modest account of the excitement, and they interrupted him frequently with exclamations of surprise and approval.

Finally Sam looked down the roadway toward Belleville.

"Don't you suppose they'll nab that chauffeur and the girl, Dick?"

"No, I don't, for they really want me, and they can't prove anything on the chauffeur. But woe be unto me if I get cotched over the river!"

The others agreed.

"Let's hustle and reach the village jeweler before he hangs up his shutter, Dick."

The advice was good, and Daresome started again in the direction of the Village with his bodyguard.

The lads chatted so merrily that they covered the distance in a surprisingly short time.

At last they reached the jeweler's and intercepted him just as he was leaving for supper. Then they started back for Merrivale Academy.

As they turned down a dark, shady street, with lights only at the end of blocks, the boys heard a suspicious sound of scuffling, and then two shots rang out close at hand.

"There's trouble brewing," said Dick.

He was right.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK'S FIGHT WITH THIEVES.

"Hold fast, Dick!" warned Skinniman. "Let's don't bite off more than we can chew."

"Yes," said Sam. "If there's gun play it means regulars, instead of volunteers like us!"

Daresome gave a sign for silence.

"S-s-sh, boys! Let's lie low here in the shadow of this big tree. Maybe we will have a chance to help. Anyway, it's safer to keep in the dark."

They did so, hugging the black carpet spread under the big, thick-foliaged trees.

"Stop there, you rascals!" called a thoroughly angry voice behind.

The sound of running steps was very audible now.

"Get outen de road, Rastus!" called one of the sprinters, as he stumbled directly over Dick Daresome.

That youth rose suddenly on hands and knees, and the

As he did so another lurched into Dick, and the two sprawled over the ground together.

"Hold them, boys!" yelled Daresome, as he clutched at the clothes of the man nearest him.

There was a sudden squawking and cackling and a flapping of wings.

"That means chicken thieves," thought Dick.

The two men struggled to get up at the same time that the Merrivale fellows closed in upon them in the dim light under the big tree.

"We'll kill ye if ye don't let us go!" cried one of them, and without warning other than this, he suddenly brought down the stock of a heavy club upon the head of Skinniman Perkins with a resounding whack.

Biff!

How it echoed, and the big student reeled backward in terrible pain.

The man sprang up and was about to run away, when Sam Thorpe made a flying football tackle.

He caught the fellow directly about the waist and they rolled over toward the gutter.

"Help there!" cried this worthy, as our friend's roommate bumped the rascal's head on the hard pavement.

But the fellow's friend was otherwise engaged at this very instant.

He was doing his best to choke Dick Daresome into limpness and relaxation.

"Oh!" gurgled poor Dick, as the colored fellow's hands tightened about his throat.

The chickens which the men had stolen had fluttered away, for the fellows had not taken time to kill the fowls before departing from the place.

"Now, I'll larn ye who you'ze a-tackling!" exclaimed Dick's opponent.

He bore heavily down upon the lad and forced his head back and back and back.

"I'll drown ye in the gutter!" he hissed, and unfortunate Daresome believed it.

But Alan Brownson, near by, did not wish to be entirely out of the scrimmage.

He heard the words and made a rush for the choker who was overpowering Dick.

As he did so there was another gun report from the direction of the first. Scurrying feet came along, and another of the depredators came plunging into the mix-up.

"Hennery, we're in bad yere—get busy!"

That was all Dick's assailant had to say, but it was enough to answer the purposes of the occasion. Henry leaped upon Alan, and now there was a perfect melee of wriggling arms, kicking legs and groans, yells and very loud cursing from the fighting darkies.

The Merrivale students did not waste strength in such language.

They had enough to do to save their wind and strength, as well as believing in a different sort of fighting. They put up a game resistance.

"I've got mine, all right!" yelled the fellow who had leaped upon Alan.

"Me, too, Hennerly!" grunted Dick's oppressor.

The other fellow was having a good time with Sam, and they rolled over and over across the pavement. He did not have the opportunity to give a report on the subject.

Poor Skinniman lay quiet and still from the club of the chicken thief.

It seemed all up with our hero and his friends, for the colored men, born fighters of the rough-and-tumble school, were preparing to deliver a few well-directed knockout blows which would end the work.

"It's time we wuz gittin' away fum hyar," remarked Henry, as he hauled off to smite the struggling Alan.

But at this very instant came a chorus of cries from the side of them.

A flare of light was cast on the struggling fellows, and they stopped their wrangling and tugging in alarm.

"Hands up there, you black rascals!" came a loud voice in extreme anger.

"You move a muscle and we'll blow your monkey heads clear off your shoulders!"

This was another voice.

"Throw the other lantern on them, too. We'll get this little party all right, all right!"

Another flare of yellow rays shone upon them.

The three men were half-blinded by the sudden rays of light shining into their eyes. But they knew from the tones that although unseen there were powerful and armed opponents behind the lights to apprehend them.

"Get off those poor lads!" came the first voice.

The colored rascals straightened up, and the Merrivale boys followed their example weakly, for they were pretty well done up by the tussle.

"Now, we'll just tie you fellows up before you do any more cussedness!"

One of the men started as if to make a run for freedom, but he stopped still more suddenly.

A whiplash had curled out and caught him around the neck.

"Wow!"

The men behind the lanterns laughed gleefully. They were enjoying the upper hand now.

"There, if you make another move we'll lynch you!" cried one of them.

This seemed to quiet the darkies like a dose of chloroform and then they held up their wrists to be bound without a murmur of dissent.

Dick saw unconscious Perkins sprawled out on the pave-

ment where he had fallen from the blow of the negro assailant.

"Why, look here!" cried our hero, forgetting about his own soreness as he sprang to his friend's aid.

"How did this happen?" asked an elderly man, leaning over the lad.

"We just tried to stop them when they ran this way, and poor Skinniman got hurt the worst. That's all."

They worked over the chap, rubbed his wrists and temples, and finally he came to consciousness again. As he weakly sat up and looked around at the flickering lanterns and the queer-looking crowd he had to laugh, despite his own misery.

"Say, this is a fine-looking aggregation!" said Perkins, as he weakly struggled to his feet, bracing himself on Dick's arm. "What is it—a bunch of Night Riders?"

The elderly man, who seemed to have been leading the chase, put in a word of explanation.

"No, it's not; it's simply a little chicken-thief party that we've been having."

"Well, how did you all happen to be on the job at once like this?" queried Daresome.

They were starting to lead the three dark prisoners down the street in the direction of the town calaboose.

"Well, you see, it was like this," explained the elderly man. "My grocery store has been robbed a lot lately, particularly of chickens which I have crated in the cellar, during the night."

"Yes, and I suppose these rascals decided to get busy with the crates?"

"Exactly. They got busy, only I had several friends within call, and we chased them. We lost the trail, though, because of a tricky turn they made. The squawking of the chickens betrayed them, and we sailed down this dark street."

"You were just in time," said Skinniman, gingerly touching a growing bump on the back of his head. "I had my tickets for Dreamland, and only your stopping the train brought me back from a long travel."

"Yes, and my breath was almost out of the business, too," said Dick.

"And I was rapidly being rolled toward the gutter to have a little drowning match, with me as the hero," said Alan, glad at his escape.

The grocer, as he turned out to be, started down the street.

"Well, lads, I am glad if we helped you in time. You certainly saved the day for us by your bravery. What are your names?"

Sam told them, and the men disappeared down the street with a promise to show them his remembering some day.

"Now, for the peaceful halls of dear old Merrivale!"

laughed Dick. "I've had enough doings to satisfy any one to-day, and we'll be starved, as it is so late."

They had left the trophy at the jeweler's, and they were fortunately freed of the bundle.

"Say, Dick," said Skinniman, "I have some money in my blue jeans that is apt to wear a hole there. Why can't all four of us hunt up a little roadhouse restaurant that I know of about a half a mile straight south of Merrivale Village?"

"Barkus is willing," laughed Daresome. "How about the rest of you?"

"You bet!" cried Sam and Alan, as two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one.

They all were surely hungry.

"Follow me and you'll wear diamonds," laughed Skinniman, starting down the dark Village street and turning the corner.

"I'd rather wear beefsteak than diamonds just at present," retorted Dick. "And I want to wear the steak internally, too, for I don't like these showy jewels."

It took them but a few minutes to reach the little restaurant, but in their tired, hungry condition it seemed hours.

At last they were seated at one of the old-fashioned square tables.

"This old place has been here ever since the Revolutionary War," said Skinniman, who was an authority on the geography of every inch of ground around Merrivale Academy.

"Do you suppose the steak we have ordered has been here that long, too?" asked Dick mildly.

This brought a laugh from the boys.

"I'd eat it if it was bearing the autograph of Oliver Cromwell," laughed Sam.

"I'm the same way. Far be it from me to be proud in a time like this," said Alan.

The steaming fragrant odors from the swinging door to the old kitchen gave them warning that the steak was under way. In a few more minutes—borne in an agony of spirit—the lads were happy, with a wonderful steak before them.

How they ate—in positive rapture!

"Say, this is worth all the excitement we have had," said Dick. "And I'm glad we are over with it, too. Tomorrow will be a busy day with that second game with Belleville on our hands, won't it?"

"Yes, you bet it will," said Sam.

"And, Dick, we must bring back that luck. They won last week, and if we can only swing a single run ahead this time it will mean that we can try for the rubber game, and have another chance to win the championship."

Dick Daresome looked across the table at his fond friends, and he pounded the board with a determined fist

which made the glasses and cutlery and even the plates do a jig step.

"Boys, we will bring victory to us! That's just settled right here and now! So we won't worry any more, but enjoy that apple pie which I see in the offing."

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER TRY FOR VICTORY.

Fortunately for the exhausted lads they had an uneventful return to the Academy.

They piled into the soft solace of the pillows very early that evening, because as it was Friday they had nothing to worry about in the line of studies.

"Wake up, you old snoriferous sleepy-head!" yelled Sam Thorpe, as he swung a large fat pillow against Dick's head with an Indian war whoop.

"Ouch! I was dreaming that the place had been surrounded by Apaches!" laughed Dick, as he sat up rubbing his eyes.

Sam began dressing with a vim.

"For goodness sake, get busy there, Dick! We are about three-quarters of an hour late for breakfast, and you will have to take unto yourself a tremendous hustle if you want anything besides cold potatoes."

Dick did want something else.

He leaped from bed, and it was a record-breaking race the boys had into their clothes.

Dick won—by a collar!

"Now, for a little speed to the mess-hall!" laughed Sam. "You beat me once, but I think I can sting you this time."

Across the dewy grass of the campus they sped like frisky young colts in a ten-acre lot.

Sam won this time, and as they dashed breathlessly into the breakfast room they met the other lads coming out.

"Throw your best curves to-day, Daresome!" said one chap.

"Don't forget the spit-ball!" advised another.

"Remember last week, Daresome!"

Dick flushed, for he did remember the defeat of the week before.

"All right, boys, we're going to win or bust every bat and wear out every base bag trying!"

His words brought a cheer from his supporters.

The breakfast tasted good to the late arrivals. They wasted no time at the table, though, for Dick wanted to run hisnine through a little preliminary practice before the affair of the afternoon.

For an hour they spent time on practice, working up quick delivery and quicker re-delivery, for Dick was deter-

mined to show the Bellevilles some team play that would make them open their eyes in dismay.

The luncheon time came, and the nine partook very sparingly of the food.

"We must be in prime condition for the affair this afternoon," said Dick.

They walked out on the field when the time for play at last arrived as fit a school nine as ever trod the sod.

"Daresome will win! Merrivale! Merrivale! Rah! rah! rah!" cheered the students rapturously, for they were sure of their victory.

But they were not to have as easy a conquest as they desired, because the Bellevilles had spent every single afternoon during the week in hard practice.

Stuart Armstrong's team was keyed up to splendid condition for the contest.

Then, too, the feeling of having won the game of the preceding week was in itself a sort of stimulant to better playing than ever.

The crowd of students of the two Academies surged down to the grand-stand, the game being on the Merrivale athletic field this week.

Singing, cheering, yelling and all sorts of student forms of enthusiasm enlivened the occasion until the umpire called for the start of the game.

It was the same umpire who had made the decisions of the week before.

Although he was a stern judge, Dick knew him to be absolutely fair.

"Play ball!"

The words passed through the crowd like an electric shock, and the cheering lads and their friends quieted down as if they had been muffled under some big cloth.

The visitors went to the bat first.

Ramsey Provost, a Belleville athlete, stepped up and swung his bat defiantly at Dick.

"This is the start of the easy walk-over!" he called to the Belleville captain, Stuart Armstrong.

But he was not justified in such preliminary confidence of a goose-egg score.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Skinniman Perkins, behind the bat. "You're not so warm!"

This little remark came at a very crucial moment, for Provost was just preparing to strike at the whirling ball which had been sent spinning from Daresome's fingers.

Biff!

The leather globe struck the catcher's mitt with a bang.

"Str-r-rike one!" shouted the umpire inexorably.

"Robber!" yelled Provost. "Say, umpire, this catcher is trying to queer me. He is hollering things at me, and it made me miss that ball."

A great hiss went up from the Merrivale crowd.

"Yellow!" they cried.

The umpire walked forward of Dick a few steps, standing between pitcher and batsman.

He shook his finger angrily.

"Say, you Belleville bleater," said he, "I've had enough of this sort of thing. Are you a phonograph that you can't stand to have any one else make a noise besides yourself?"

"Well, he hollered in my ear!"

The umpire started back.

"Go ahead with this game, and if you put up any more kicks I'll send you to the grand-stand, where you won't be bothered at all!" he snapped.

Skinniman tossed the ball lightly to Dick, with an expanding grin on his expansive features.

A howl of derision went up from the Belleville admirers in the stand. But it took more than that to freeze this particular umpire.

He bit off another chew of tobacco, and with a comical protrusion of one cheek, he nodded to Dick.

"Play baseball!"

Another time our hero swung his sinewy arms, and the ball whizzed straight as a die over the plate.

Provost, at the bat, evidently thought that he would be wise to let it pass, for he was still excited over his first miss.

"Stur-rike tuh!"

The umpire's language was queer, but the Merrivale rooters understood the meaning without the need of a dictionary of terms.

"Hurray for Daresome!" they cheered.

Dick smiled, and his arm shot forth again, this time with a baffling drop, which fooled Provost because of its suddenness and the speed with which it came.

The chap struck viciously.

"If that had hit it would be in the next county," thought Dick.

But it didn't get so far, because the globe was already in Skinniman's mitt, and the umpire was calling out a decision which brought the Merrivale fans to their feet in wild exuberance of spirits.

"Str-rike thruh, and out!"

This was a good beginning, and Dick was confident that his arm was in good condition, and that he could win out in a pitcher's battle.

Yet, being a good baseball captain, he was aware that a pitcher's battle cannot always be counted upon.

"Just keep your heads, boys," cautioned Dick to his fielders and basemen, as he turned around for an instant to face them. "Remember, the luck will turn at any minute, and we must be ready."

This was good advice. But the trouble was that the rest of the team placed such implicit confidence in their stalwart captain, Dick, that they were a bit careless.

They were destined to pay for this let-down of caution in the next few minutes.

Jack Chanler stepped to the bat next.

He stood quietly, and yet with determination showing in every inch of his sinewy figure. Here was a different sort of foe from Provost, as Daresome easily saw.

Whizz!

Dick tried to work a certain trick curve.

The consequence was that the ball whizzed a very small fraction to the left of the plate.

It was just far enough, however.

"Ball one!"

The umpire's tones cast a chill over Dick, for even he thought it a safe toss.

Again he tried the same trick.

The curve did work beautifully, and yet it failed to come in the requisite zone over the plate.

"Ball tuh!"

"Good eye!" shouted the Belleville fans.

"You've got his goat, Jack!" yelled Stuart Armstrong from the bench.

Again with compressed lips Dick Daresome started to swing his arms for a throw.

"Now, for a little trick play," thought Dick.

He tossed the ball without a waste of speed in such a way that it went at least a foot and a half from the plate.

Little did the Bellevilles realize his plan, for Dick was working a daring trick.

"Ball three!"

The fans from over the river yelled with great aplomb.

"Easy meat! Easy meat!"

But now Dick swung his arms again, and this time he tossed a ball that looked like an easy and certain toss for the plate.

Instead it was a trick throw that he had learned from a professional player the summer before.

The ball sailed right toward the center of the plate in a calm, easy-going sort of manner.

Chanler thought it was so easy that he positively chuckled with delight.

"Ha! ha!"

Biff!

He struck the ball at an angle which should have sent it across the field, safe from outstretched hands, and been a good two-bagger, at the least.

But the ball acted very peculiarly.

It was whirling in a rapid, downward way, despite its seeming easiness, and the blow merely brought the leather sphere to the ground with a bump.

High it bounced, and landed right in the Merrivale pitcher's hand.

"Run, Jack! Run like a whitehead!" screeched Armstrong, overcoming his astonishment enough to coach his

man. There was a bare possibility of making the base, it seemed.

But Armstrong was not right.

Daresome whirled with a quickness that was a surprise, and the ball flashed through the air to Sam Thorpe's waiting hands on first base.

"Out!" cried the umpire, as Sam tossed the ball blithely to second, and the second gave it an overhand flip to Dick.

"Easy!"

Dick laughed.

"Now for the third and last victim."

The boys on the stand were yelling lustily at this neat trick. So Dick pretended that he was doing the same thing again. The next Belleville at bat was looking for just such a ball.

He was determined, however, to make a real hit.

"If I give an upward curve it ought to counteract that down shoot," thought this lad.

He swung his bat in just this manner on a ball that was coming easy and evenly toward him.

Instead of sending it forward, his upward tilt caused the leather globe to ascend high in the air straight over his head.

"Foul!" called the umpire. "Out!"

It had been caught in Perkins' broad mitt and the inning had ended with a victory of control thus far.

CHAPTER XI.

A DESPERATE TRIAL.

The Merrivales were now at bat.

Dick had put Sam first on the list, and the youth came up with a calm air, determined to do or bust, as the old saying puts it.

Biff!

At the very first ball from the pitcher Sam did bust—in the case of the bat.

It was the result of having gripped the handle a little away from the right angle. The grain of the wood was in the opposite direction, according to the way he held it.

Consequently, the impact of the wood against the speeding leather caused the bat to crack with a rending sound.

The ball fell forward, and so anxious was Stuart Armstrong to get it before it touched the ground, that he dropped his catcher's mitt, springing forward almost between Sam's legs.

He did not reach the ball.

But he did succeed in sending Dick's roommate headlong very roughly.

"What's this going on?" cried the umpire, rushing forward with upraised hand.

"I'm trying to get that ball, that's all," said Armstrong.

"There's some crooked work here, or I'm a liar," muttered the umpire. "Now, you just keep away from the batter's position like this, or I'll disqualify you."

Armstrong reddened angrily.

"Say, I am the captain of the Belleville baseball team," said he.

"I don't care if you are the head of the whole academy," said the umpire. "I am here to umpire this game. I am going to see it carried out fairly, or the game will be called the next inning."

Armstrong walked back sulkily.

"Well, I didn't mean to knock him over," he grunted ungraciously.

"Go on with the game," said the official simply.

But it was plain to see that he was none too favorably impressed by this little tactic.

Sam struck out.

His fall had jarred his arm and nerves, as Armstrong had undoubtedly intended that it should do.

Next came Alan Brownson to take his turn with the stick.

He stood quietly facing the pitcher, Jack Chanler, with a poise which gave no clue as to what sort of hit he intended to make.

The ball shot toward him.

Alan saw that it was going to go outside the line of the plate, but he had a plan of his own.

He stepped forward and swung with a horizontal movement.

Biff!

The bat struck it with perfect direction.

"Great!" yelled Dick delightedly.

Alan raced down toward first base, while the ball whizzed along between the outstretched hands of the pitcher, the shortstop, and even past the left fielder.

It was one of those "Marathon hits," which speed along evenly, smoothly, and yet cover a lot of space.

"Go it, Alan!" coached Daresome, putting his hands to his mouth trumpet-wise.

Alan certainly did go it—he covered the ground so rapidly that before the ball was back on the scene of real action he was breathing hard but happily on the third base.

"That's the stuff!" laughed Dick as he selected a good stick and came to take his place.

He could not resist the temptation of winking maliciously in the face of Stuart Armstrong, his bitter rival, who stood behind the bat with the big glove ready.

Armstrong drew back his hand a minute, as if aching to hit Dick with it.

Then he remembered himself, and nodded to the pitcher for a throw.

Whizz—kerplump!

A well-directed curve fooled even Dick, and the umpire recorded his error.

"Strike one!"

Armstrong was especially anxious to sting Daresome, so he walked out past the batter to hand the ball to the pitcher, while he murmured a direction.

The Merrivale lads roared at this.

"Why don't you take some chairs out and have tea there in the pitcher's box?" screeched one lad through a megaphone.

The words carried all over the grounds, and were heard by every single fan.

Naturally, this did not please Armstrong any too much, and he gave Dick a burning glance of malevolence as he passed him, to take a crouching position behind the bat.

He came up very close to Dick.

Our hero glanced back, and saw that the other fellow was undoubtedly trying to get him nervous by cutting off some of his swinging room.

Whizz!

"Strike two!" yelled the umpire, for it was a good, clean strike. Dick had drawn the bat back, but the presence of Armstrong so close behind him rattled him for an instant, and that instant cost one strike.

"Say," said Dick, "you get back there and give me room enough to play ball, or I'll soak you over the head with this bat, Stuart Armstrong!"

The other fellow leaped up to a straight position.

"Did you hear that, Mr. Umpire—did you? Daresome is threatening to slug me!"

The umpire made a gesture of impatience.

"Go on with the game," he cried. "If you don't give him room I don't blame him very much. Stand back there from the plate at once."

The pitcher swung for another cast.

This time the ball was straight, and Dick swung for a strike and a hit. But his bat came in contact with the chest-pad of Armstrong, who was hugging the position.

Without waiting to hear the umpire's decision, Daresome swung his bat to the ground and whirled about.

"You contemptible crook!" he cried in honest wrath. "You can't play fair to save your life."

He gave Armstrong a shove with his hand, which was so sudden that the fellow toppled over backward.

"Now," said Dick with flaming eyes, "you just keep your distance from me. Any more of this sneaky trickery, and I'll mop up Merrivale Field with you!"

The grandstand was in an uproar.

"Quiet there!" cried the umpire, rushing up.

Armstrong had staggered to his feet again, and he jerked the heavy iron mask off his head.

"You will, will you?"

With the cry he sprang at Dick.

He swung the heavy mask with his right hand, holding the straps and using it as a sort of blackjack.

He brought the weapon down upon Dick's shoulder. The only reason that he didn't strike our hero on the head was that Dick dodged just in the nick of time.

"Oh!"

A cry of pain escaped Daresome's lips despite his iron will, for the heavy iron landed with terrible force on his left shoulder.

"Well, if you're trying that," exclaimed Dick, "here's a return compliment!"

And at that word he swung his right fist up under the other fellow's chin.

The blow seemed to lift Armstrong off his feet, and the Belleville captain fell heavily backward.

Dick squared off, his eyes blazing.

The whole crowd of players were swarming into the center now, and it looked as if there were going to be a battle royal of some sort.

"If any of you fellows don't like it," said Daresome, his face white with anger, "I'll show you what to do about it."

Without a doubt some more of the Bellevilles would have stepped in to fill the breach.

But the umpire was right on the scene, and he stepped between the warring factions.

"Say, you guys give me a pain! You don't know whether you're playing baseball or having a boxing bout."

He shoved Dick back with one hand, and with the other pulled off his own mask.

"Now I wish you'd decide which it's to be—baseball or prizefighting."

The lads were crowding all about, and the fans were crowding on to the field from the grandstand.

"Play ball! Play ball!"

"Go on with the game!" cried the wiser heads among them.

The umpire nodded.

"Get back there, then," said he, "and we'll go on with this game. But if there's any more scrapping I'm out of it—that's all! Get back and take your seats."

The lads crowded up, and shoving, pushing, growling, they ungraciously returned to their seats.

Daresome stood waiting for the decision.

"Well, what about it, Mr. Umpire? Is this crowding and trickery going to continue?"

The umpire pointed to Armstrong, who stood, now, holding a throbbing chin.

"Say, you, I'm going to put you out for starting this

rough-house," said he. "I'm a believer in good rivalry and hot sport, but there ain't nothing to this winning any old way."

Armstrong let out a coarse interjection, which made Dick pale with rage again.

"Say, bo," said the umpire, "out you go. This here Daresome was right in soaking you. If it had been me I'd still be blotting up the sod with you."

Armstrong started off toward the bench, fuming and angry, while a terrible outcry and sound of groans and hisses arose from the Belleville half of the grandstand.

"Robber!"

"Fixed game!"

The umpire's gray eyes sparkled, but he strode out to his position again.

"Go on there at the bat," said he to Dick. "You have two strikes and one ball. Send up another catcher from that Belleville nine, or else forfeit the game."

Dick was pondering something in his own mind.

He knew what would be said about this game. He was certain that the Belleville fellows would never stop talking about the unfairness of the umpire. Yet he knew that the umpire was right.

"Still, Armstrong is their best player, and the best batter in this part of the country," thought Dick. "If he is out of the game we will have it cinched."

Here was the certainty of success.

The Bellevilles were jeering, cat-calling, and raising a general disturbance.

They realized this as well as Dick—they saw defeat for them as the result of their champion being disqualified.

Suddenly Dick held up his hand toward the lads on the grandstand for silence.

"Sssh!" he called.

The noise continued for an instant.

Then he held up both hands, and naturally the curiosity of the crowd got the better. They became silent.

"Fellows from Merrivale and Belleville, I have a proposal to make," said Dick Daresome.

"What is it?" called the only fan who was not too surprised for reply.

"I ask the umpire to let Armstrong in the game again."

The Merrivale lads now set up a terrific clamor.

"You're crazy, Dick," said Skinniman.

"Not on your life!" yelled the Merrivales.

Daresome held his hand up again.

"It's just this way, fellows," he continued in his clear tone. "I was not treated fairly, and I won't stand for it. But you visitors will say that we couldn't win unless we got Armstrong out of the game."

There was a murmur at this.

But Dick again signaled for a hearing.

A hush came over them once more.

"Well, we boys from Merrivale never have been quitters and never will," he cried.

The Merrivales let forth a mighty second to the motion at this juncture.

"And we don't need trickery of any sort to win our game."

"You're right, Dick!" yelled his team-mates.

"We can win this game with Armstrong as well as without him, so I ask the umpire, as captain of the Merrivale team, to put Stuart Armstrong back in the game, and let us wallop Belleville as she has never been walloped before!"

The reader can imagine the cheer which went up from the Merrivales.

Even a rousing round of applause came from the Belleville crowd, too, for they were not bad chaps at heart.

They were forced to admire Dick's fight spunk, and they picked up hope again, knowing that it would be a match worth while.

Armstrong, at a nod from the umpire, returned to his position behind the bat.

"I guess he'll keep his distance this time," thought Dick, and he was right.

The next ball from the Belleville pitcher came straight and true, but with an overpowering swiftness. Yet Daresome was keyed up to a strength he had never felt before.

He was on his mettle, and he knew that he must uphold the honor and victory of the school after his daring proposal.

"Gosh, I hope he gets stung!" muttered one of Clayton's friends in the grandstand. He was thinking of the plight of Clayton, sitting cooped up in a dormitory room on this eventful afternoon.

But Dick did not feel any evil influence from this bad wish. Instead, he swung on that ball with all his heart and soul and strength and will-power.

Bang!

The concussion sounded terrific to the strained nerves of the excited fans.

Dick's hit shot up in a beautiful rounded curve, sailing high above the heads even of the galloping fielders.

It was a home run!

Around the course sped Daresome with twinkling feet, running as he had never done before.

Alan Brownson came in to first with exasperating calmness, and Dick brought up on a final spurt at the plate as the ball followed him about two feet in the rear.

It was a narrow shave.

But the reader can well picture the wild frenzy of the Merrivale fans.

They leaped up and down, they pounded each other on the backs and yelled for Daresome. If Dick could have had a quarter for every time his name was breathed and yelled

in a tone of admiration that afternoon he would have never need to work for the rest of his life.

But he did not let this spoil him.

Instead, with happy spirits he settled down to work, and as his friends afterward said, he pitched the best game of his life.

Inning after inning they came up, and yet the Bellevilles were held down to single base hits—a very few, at that—which were soon squelched.

Dick justified his own daring that day.

He did more.

He ran his nine's score up to an even ten hits, and the discomfiture of the Belleville team was complete.

As the game ended, his own mates crowded around to wring his hand. The Belleville captain walked away disgruntled and angry, but to Dick's surprise the great crowd of the Belleville fans acted in an entirely different way.

They surged around toward Dick and his nine, and at first our hero thought there was going to be a free-for-all fight over the lost game.

Instead, the crowd of Bellevilles, under the leadership of Frank Moffat, stopped a few feet away. The Merrivales regarded them in surprised silence.

"What's the matter with Dick Daresome, the game captain of Merrivale?" cried Moffat in ringing tones.

"He's all right!" came the cheer.

It was a recognition of Dick—the first he had ever heard that pleased him—the first time that Belleville had treated him squarely, in fact.

"Rah, rah, rah, Belleville—rah, rah, rah, Daresome!"

Dick looked down with a queer feeling as if he were going to have some foolish tears in his eyes.

The Merrivales answered with a cheer for Belleville.

It was a wonderfully different ending from that of the game the week before.

And it was a double, instead of a single, victory for Dick Daresome!

THE END.

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